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Bluffdale group gets settlement delay

By Jacob Santini
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Bluffdale residents - fresh from having a referendum rebuffed Tuesday night by their City Council - have put the disposition of a third of the town's landmass back on hold.

The residents group, known as Bluffdale United, succeeded Wednesday in delaying a judge's approval of a settlement of a lawsuit that had sought to disconnect 4,000 acres from the small southwest Salt Lake County community.

"I'm not inclined to be rushed into a decision that I'm not comfortable with," 3rd District Judge Anthony Quinn told developers who had threatened de-annexation to get the zoning they want. "I know there is big money at stake here."

Residents fought the change in zoning laws that the city passed earlier this year to help the developers move forward with their massive housing/commercial development.

And on Tuesday, the City Council worked around the residents' proposed referendum by approving, 4-1, a consent decree that outlined how the developments would be built.

It is that settlement agreement that led to Wednesday's court hearing and subsequent judicial delay.

Bluffdale United believes the agreement means the development is approved and there will be no public hearing or public votes to settle disagreements over the required zoning, plats or subdivisions.

"They are trying to get the court to bypass state statute and city ordinance," said James Tracy, an attorney representing the residents.

Developers disagree.

"There is a public process," said Bruce Baird, who represents one of the developments slated for the 4,000 acres. "The voters elect the City Council" to make decisions for them.

The developments were disputed for more than a decade as the city fought to preserve large-lot - one unit per acre - building in Bluffdale. The land dispute went to court in 2004 when the developers first asked to de-annex from the city. Members of the Bluffdale City Council opted to settle the suit because they did not want to lose one-third of their community's landmass.

Bluffdale United is not through. It filed a second referendum on Wednesday, this one opposing Tuesday's settlement agreement.

The judge concluded the hearing, saying he wants the parties to file opinions on whether he has the "right to approve a settlement that dictates development" and leaves resident input behind.

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